

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-12

INFO OCT-01 IO-14 ISO-00 AF-10 EUR-25 ACDA-19 USSS-00

TRSE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 NSAE-00 NSCE-00 SSO-00 USIE-00

PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSC-10 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01

SPC-03 SS-20 INRE-00 CCO-00 DRC-01 /144 W

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R 200930Z OCT 73

FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0194

INFO AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

USMISSIN USUN NY

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 8379

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, IS

SUBJ: IDF CASUALTIES AS A DOMESTIC POLITICAL FACTOR

1. WE REPORTED IN EARLY STAGE OF WAR WIDESPREAD FEAR IN ISRAEL THAT EXTENT OF CASUALTIES, NOTABLY IN FIRST DAY OR SO OF WAR, HAD BEEN VERY HIGH. IN OUR CONTACTS DURING FIRST WEEK WE FOUND THAT ANGUISH OVER THIS SUPPOSITION WAS TRANSLATING ITSELF INTO CRITICISM OF GOI FOR NOT HAVING MOBILIZED EARLIER AND NOT HAVING TAKEN PREEMPTIVE MILITARY ACTION AND INTO PREDICTIONS OF BITTER POLITICAL ATTACK ON LABOR ALIGNMENT OVER THIS ISSUE FOLLOWING WAR. SUCH CRITICISM UNDOUBTEDLY WOULD HAVE BEEN HEARD EVEN WITHOUT FEARS RE HIGH CASUALTIES, AND FEARS RE CASUALTIES PROBABLY SERVED SIMPLY TO MAKE THIS CRITICISM STRONGER.

2. CASUALTY TOTAL RELEASED BY GOI OCTOBER 14 WAS CONSIDERABLY LOWER THAN EXPECTED. OCTOBER 14 ALSO WAS FIRST DAY IN WAR THAT GOI INFORMED NEXT OF KIN ABOUT KNOWN FATALITIES; UNTIL THEN ONLY FAMILIES OF WOUNDED HAD RECEIVED NOTIFICATION. FATALITY NOTIFICATIONS WERE CARRIED OUT IN MOST HUMANE MANNER FACE TO FACE BY TWO TO FOUR-PERSON TEAMS, INCLUDING AT LEAST

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ONE IDF OFFICER AND PHSYCHIATRIST OR PHYSICIAN: AFTER FIRST

NOTIFICATION IN EACH NEIGHBORHOOD, TEAM COVERING NEIGHBORHOOD REQUESTED MEMBER OF FIRST FAMILY TO ACCOMPANY TEAM ON SUBSEQUENT NOTIFICATIONS TO HELP EASE GRIEF OF OTHERS BY SHOW OF SOLIDARITY.

3. RELIEF FOR THOSE WORRIED FAMILIES WHICH DID NOT RECEIVE NOTIFICATIONS OCTOBER 14 WAS OF COURSE GREAT. COMPLETION OF NOTIFICATIONS ON THAT DATE, AND ANNOUNCEMENT OF SMALLER TOTAL THAN EXPECTED, TOOK MUCH TENSION OUT OF AIR IN ISRAEL. IT DID NOT CURE PROBLEM, HOWEVER, AS ISRAELIS WERE QUICK TO NOTE THAT TOTALS RELEASED OF KILLED AND WOUNDED IN ACTION WERE NOT ACCOMPANIED BY TOTAL OF PERSONNEL MISSING IN ACTION -- MANY OF WHOM MAY TURN OUT TO BE FATALITIES.

4. OUR CONTACTS HAVE GENERALLY SUPPOSED SINCE OCTOBER 14 THAT CASUALTY RATE HAS NOT BEEN PARTICULARLY HIGH. IMPRESSION PREVAILS THAT IDF OPERATIONS ARE BEING CONDUCTED IN SUCH FASHION AS TO MINIMIZE CASUALTIES. THEREFORE, CASUALTY ISSUE AT END OF SECOND WEEK OF WAR, UNLIKE AT END OF FIRST WEEK, IS NOT A BURNING POLITICAL SUBJECT.

5. THIS IS NOT TO SUGGEST THAT CASUALTY FACTOR IS NOT VERY MUCH IN PSYCHOLOGICAL BACKGROUND HERE OR THAT IT DOES NOT WEIGH SPECIFICALLY IN ISRAELI DECISIONS ABOUT CONDUCT OF WAR AND ITS POSSIBLE EARLY TERMINATION OR PROLONGATION. AND IT WILL PROBABLY FIGURE VERY MUCH IN BITTER POLITICAL DEBATE AFTER WAR. BUT AS OF THIS MOMENT, IT IS NOT A SOURCE OF SHARP TENSION, AND CONTENTION, WITHIN COUNTRY.
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